

# Indie Music Marketing Secrets

By Bob Baker, [TheBuzzFactor.com](http://TheBuzzFactor.com)

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Bob Baker is the author of "Guerrilla Music Marketing Handbook," "Killer Music Press Kits," "Music Marketing Crash Course," and "What Every Musician Should Know About Self-Promotion." He also publishes [www.TheBuzzFactor.com](http://www.TheBuzzFactor.com), a web site and e-zine that deliver marketing tips, self-promotion ideas and empowering messages to music people of all kinds. Get your FREE subscription to Bob's e-zine by visiting <http://TheBuzzFactor.com/> today.

Enjoy!

-Bob

# Outrageous Music Marketing Ideas

*by Bob Baker*

I'm not sure exactly what triggered it, but recently my mind started popping with creative, off-the-wall ways to promote your music. So I jotted down some notes and am sharing them with you in this article.

I'll let you determine whether these are truly "outrageous" ideas. But one thing is for sure: They certainly aren't the traditional things that most musicians think about when they do marketing.

Ready? Here we go ...

## *Outrageous Music Marketing Idea #1*

### **Turn Yourself Into a Happy Meal**

I definitely advocate that indie musicians *\*not\** try to emulate the same tactics as the major labels. However, there are times when you can take one of their ideas (or an idea from a related entertainment industry) and give it a small-scale spin.

You know how the major film studios promote their new animated features by tying into fast food chain kid meals, such as the McDonald's Happy Meal. Most likely, you won't be able to land a nationwide Happy Meal deal. But you might be able to do something cool with a local deli or restaurant.

I know a couple of radio disc jockeys in my town who have sandwiches or special meals named after them at certain eateries. Why couldn't you do that? Especially if you perform regularly at a particular coffee shop, bar or restaurant.

For example, if your band is called Sweet Potato Sunrise, approach a manager with the idea of offering a Sweet Potato Sunrise omelette, or a Sweet Potato Sunrise latte, or a Sweet Potato Sunrise daiquiri?

You get the idea. The special name would get you exposure at the establishment whenever it's open (hopefully, you're item will be listed on the menu). Plus, you can use the unique promotional angle to get mentions in the local press.

## *Outrageous Music Marketing Idea #2*

### **Become an Instant Cult Classic**

The success of the quirky film *Napoleon Dynamite* has me thinking. The movie itself is still growing on me, but I'm fascinated by the buzz it has among people who really

connect with it. Most of my friends who rave about it have seen it numerous times and claim that the more they see it, the more they appreciate and enjoy it.

What a nice position for a filmmaker to be in. Admittedly, a lot of people don't like the movie and its flat characters at all. But those who do appreciate the film like it a lot – and preach about it to their friends, memorize lines, encourage theatres to have midnight showings, etc.

How can you tap into that? It's hard to manufacture cult status, but here's an idea: What if your music CD came with an accompanying trivia game? And what if the game tied directly into the theme, style and lyrics of your music? The game instructions could be included in the CD sleeve or delivered separately to everyone who bought one. Or, to make a greater impact with the trivia game idea, you could package the CD in a DVD case or even a small retail box.

To make this work, you'd have to come up with a cool, interactive game idea and have a CD filled with interesting, funny or insightful lyrics and music. But if you can get people examining the nuances of your material and sharing notes with other people who are memorizing your stuff, you might have some powerful buzz going for you.

Check out my blog at [MusicPromotionBlog.com](http://MusicPromotionBlog.com) for more outrageous ideas. But hopefully, these will get your wheels turning in the meantime.

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- [50 Ways to Promote & Sell Your Music on the Internet](#)
- [Guerrilla Music Marketing Power Course](#)

# The Power of Personality

*by Bob Baker*

When you promote yourself via e-mail or with the words you use on your web site, you have a choice. You can be straight-forward and matter-of-fact (also known as bland and boring). Or you can communicate with pizzazz.

**Case in point:** My friend Gregg Hopkins plays in a band called The Melroys. He could have sent a run-of-the-mill e-mail to promote a recent show, including the rudimentary club name, address, phone number, etc. Instead, he sent this:

Git yerself down to the Broadway Oyster Bar tonight where The MELROYS will present our little Rock and Roll fandango. The food is delicious, the adult beverages are cool and refreshing, the music will be swinging, and you'll fit right in with the other beautiful people there. Showtime is 9-1. See ya there!

Gregg Hopkins  
TheMelroys.com

P.S. Any person peeved by perpetual pestering such as this posting will be promptly purged from this list upon proper petition.

Ya gotta admit, this short message is a fun read – which leads one to assume that a Melroys live show will be a fun event. And that's smart marketing. (The only thing I might add is an address and phone number of the venue for those fans who might not know where it is.)

So don't be afraid to show your personality. In fact, go out of your way to do something fun or different or creative any time you communicate with the public about your music. Got it? Good.

## Use Hypnotic Descriptions

Here's another example from a longtime musical pal, Michael Schaerer. In this recent e-mail, he does a great job of painting word pictures of the venues he plays and describing what it means to him:

We'll be at Felix's starting around 9:30 Saturday night ... if it's anything like last week was, it'll be a full-fledged rock concert ... and it'll sound better than most of them too! It's really like seeing your

favorite band in your living room. So intimate and powerful at the same time.

Come early for a fine dinner, or eat late ... the kitchen is open 'till close, baby. You really need to come out to Felix's and see why it's so popular! Call 'em at 314-645-6565. Felix's rules. Period.

On Sunday, Amy Miller and I close out my work week at the Tin Can Tavern on the south side. We play 9:00 to 11:30 or so and we like playing together so much that we usually have to be told to quit! Great new songs, and Amy just sounds like an angel ... amazing. Please attend. [www.TinCanTavern.com](http://www.TinCanTavern.com) or 314-865-3003.

Last week was a great week for me. So many people came and enjoyed my music that I was overwhelmed. Thank you, really. It means everything to me.

Michael  
[www.msgstl.com](http://www.msgstl.com)

This example is so powerful for many reasons. The way Michael describes the places he plays, you can't help but want to go and experience the vibe yourself. And you know the venue owners have got to love the ringing endorsements, too.

Finally, as Michael illustrates in his last sentence, always remember to thank your fans. They're the reason you're doing more than just playing music in an empty room. Without people to listen, enjoy and support you, your creative process would be a lot less satisfying. So be sure to regularly express your gratitude.

## **Your Comfy, Cozy Computer**

The challenge when promoting yourself online is this: There's only so much human warmth you can get from a computer. Anything you can do to make your online communication more warm and fuzzy will make you stand out and be more appreciated.

No one does this better than Derek Sivers and CD Baby. If you've ever purchased music from [cdbaby.com](http://cdbaby.com), you've probably received this shipping confirmation e-mail – one of the classic “power of personality” messages you're likely to see:

Your CD has been gently taken from our CD Baby shelves with sterilized contamination-free gloves and placed onto a satin pillow.

A team of 50 employees inspected your CD and polished it to make sure it was in the best possible condition before mailing.

Our packing specialist from Japan lit a candle and a hush fell over the crowd as he put your CD into the finest gold-lined box that money can buy.

We all had a wonderful celebration afterwards and the whole party marched down the street to the post office where the entire town of Portland waved 'Bon Voyage!' to your package, on its way to you, in our private CD Baby jet on this day (date inserted here).

I hope you had a wonderful time shopping at CD Baby. We sure did. Your picture is on our wall as 'Customer of the Year'. We're all exhausted but can't wait for you to come back to CDBABY.COM!!

Thank you once again,

Derek Sivers, president, CD Baby  
the little CD store with the best new independent music

Now that's powerful .. and effective! Think twice before sending your fans another e-mail message. And always remember the power of personality!

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- [50 Ways to Promote & Sell Your Music on the Internet](#)
- [Guerrilla Music Marketing Power Course](#)

# Marketing Lessons From an 8-Year-Old Girl

*by Bob Baker*

One morning not long ago, when my daughter was 8, I was driving her to school when she asked me to cue up a very familiar song on the CD player. If you have kids, you know that children often love repeated exposure to stuff they like. They'll contently watch a favorite movie over and over again, driving the adults in the house batty from the repetition.

Well, one of her favorite songs is "Accidentally in Love" by Counting Crows. I like to think she enjoys it so much because I recently played it at a show she attended. But the truth more likely has something to do with the *Shrek 2* soundtrack.

Anyway, that morning we were on our second spin of "So she said, 'What's the problem, baby' ..." when I finally asked her, "Why do you like this song so much?"

Her answer: "I don't know. It just puts me in a good mood."

## The Light Bulb Goes Off

Wow. That might sound like a simplistic answer, but when you think about it, isn't that at the core of enjoying any type of music, at any stage of life? You enjoy your favorite music because it makes you feel good.

The key words there are *\*feel\** and *\*good\**. Generally speaking, music makes the person enjoying it feel good – or better about themselves than they might have before hearing it.

There are exceptions: Sometimes people listen to particular types of music when they are sad or angry or not feeling "good." In these instances, people use music to match their mood – to cradle and support them in whatever state they happen to be in. But, regardless of the mood, people always use music to "feel," whether it's good or otherwise.

But I contend that most of the time people turn to music to feel better about themselves – to, as my daughter says, put themselves in a good mood.

## Feeling Great About Feeling Good

Music fans might say they love an act because of the vocalist's skills or the guitar player's chops or the groove laid down by the bass player. But those things are just the means that lead to the ultimate fan payoff: feeling good.

So ... How does your music make your fans feel? In what way do you elevate their mood to "good" – or, better yet, great? The answers to those questions can be different for every artist. But asking them and pondering the answers will help you understand the true relationship you have with your fans.

Bottom line: Putting more people in a "good mood" will help your music career more than just about any marketing tactic you could ever conceive.

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- [Branding Yourself Online](#)

# Formulating Your Best Music Promotion Plan

*by Bob Baker*

A lot of people who subscribe to my Buzz Factor e-zine, read my books, and attend my workshops tell me that once they shift into a brainstorming mode, the self-promotion ideas come faster than Billy Joel behind the wheel of a Mazarotti. My first piece of advice regarding this fantastic state of mind is:

Buy a notebook or journal and capture these thoughts by writing them down. Don't expect to remember everything later. That rarely works. Grab ideas while they're hot.

If you're driving when inspiration strikes, carefully pull over and scribble down your thoughts on a gas receipt, fast food bag, or whatever is handy. If you're in a bar or restaurant, use a napkin. If you're in the shower ... well, be creative and find a way to record those great ideas.

## So Many Ideas, So Little Time

Once you have a master list of earth-shattering, career-boosting concepts, things don't get any easier. Now you probably feel as if you have so many options, you don't know where to start. Most music people get so flustered at this point, they do nothing. Or they do a little bit of everything all at once and spread themselves too thin, with nothing to show for all their hard work.

Well, I believe in keeping things simple. Don't overwhelm yourself. For starters, before you jump into any new grand schemes, there are two basic things you should do every week, if not every day, no matter what else you may be working on:

- 1)** Write, record and perform great music. This is no secret. The most creative promotion ideas in the world will do nothing to help mediocre music. So work on your music-making craft constantly. All it takes is one killer song to light a fire that will sustain an entire career.
- 2)** The second thing you should do almost every day is to take steps to connect with and attract more fans. Don't get sidetracked with technicalities and industry connections and stuff that doesn't matter. Keep a constant focus on fans.

## Creating Your Music Plan

Now, what about those specific big ideas you have for getting exposure, selling CDs, etc.? Get out a calendar that covers the next 12 months, and start writing down your best ideas and the times of the year they would work best.

Think this through and move things around on the calendar until you've got one or two great ideas listed for each month. Doing this will give you a promotional roadmap so you know the best ways to spend your time and energy every month. Your efforts will be more focused this way and more likely to generate results.

Don't just wing it and leave things to chance. This is your career and livelihood at stake here. Set priorities. Create an action plan. You can always tweak and alter the plan as you go. But having one in the first place gives you a starting point and a direction ... and a reason to get busy and start promoting your music now.

So formulate a plan – your ideal plan – then ... get out there and promote yourself!

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# Who Do You Sound Like? (And Why It's Important)

*by Bob Baker*

Admit it. Most musicians hate to compare themselves to other artists. Does this describe you? If you feel you are a unique, one-of-a-kind creative being, I wholeheartedly agree with you. But if you think you shouldn't tarnish your musical identity with comparisons to other artists, I ask you to reconsider.

Why? It has everything to do with this crazy little hunk of matter called the human brain. According to the [Berkeley Lab](#), "Humans retrieve information best when it can be linked to other related information." In other words, without a familiar reference point, people have a tough time filing away and remembering new sights, sounds, smells, etc.

## Tapping Into 'The System'

In an [article by Allen Barker](#), he writes, "Memory is a dynamic process. It arises from reminders and cues." The process that helps the brain sort out new stimulus is called "associative memory." Barker continues, "An associative memory is a memory system that takes an input 'key' and produces the 'closest' stored memory that matches that key. If the memory had stored a picture of a chair, for example, and were presented with a 'key' of half a chair, it would fill in the remaining half of the chair."

If you think this is all impractical mumbo jumbo, check out the work being done by [Pandora](#). It's [Music Genome Project](#) is a system that analyzes music using "a set of attributes that capture not only the musical identity of a song, but also many significant qualities that are relevant to understanding the musical preferences of consumers who browse the material. Each song is analyzed along 400 distinct musical attributes to create a complete musical analysis."

Sounds deep, but in essence, the Pandora research works much like Amazon's "customers who bought X also purchased Y" recommendations.

## Making the Mental Music Connection

Another site that understands the importance of this concept is [WeSoundLike.com](#). The home page reads "Find new music like your favorite music! Just browse for your favorite music artists and we'll tell you the new and upcoming artists that are

influenced by them!" To add your act, go to the submission page at [www.wesoundlike.com/SubmissionForm.cfm](http://www.wesoundlike.com/SubmissionForm.cfm).

Convinced yet? Music fans need clues. People who enjoy your music also enjoy other artists. And many of those artists are more familiar to the masses than you are right now. So tap into the mental links that already exist in the minds of fans who support other similar-sounding artists.

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# Expand Your Definition of a Live Performance

*by Bob Baker*

(The following article is excerpted from my new audiobook, [What Every Musician Should Know About Self-Promotion](#).)

Let me ask you ... What has to happen for a person to be converted into being a fan of your music? There are a number of possible answers, but at the most basic level, one thing has to happen: The person must hear your music.

And there are only so many ways someone can hear your music: on the radio or on television, on the Internet, in a dance club or a retail store, from a friend on a home or car stereo or ... during a live performance.

Let's focus on that last one, because even with all of the advancements in technology, live performance continues to be one of the best ways to connect with fans, sell CDs and prosper as an artist.

Hopefully, your marketing plans include a heaping helping of live shows. But what type of live shows do you plan? The problem is, many musicians get stuck in live performance ruts and fail to think outside the box. For instance, most rock bands flock like lemmings to nightclubs. Most acoustic singer-songwriters obsess over coffee shops and folk venues. That's fine, but they end the thought process there – and then complain that there aren't enough gig slots for all of the acts who want to play.

**The solution:** Redefine your live performance goals. And ask yourself the right questions. If you only ask, "How can I book more shows at clubs?" you'll rarely look outside that possibility. But if you ask, "How can I reach more of my ideal fans through live performances?" then your list of potential venues is suddenly wide open.

Where can you play in front of more potential fans? If nightclubs is one answer, great – continue to pursue that. But what about community festivals, neighborhood block parties, grand openings, rallies, auto shows, craft fairs, the finishing line of a city marathon, a public beach on a sunny day ... anywhere that large groups of people gather is fair game.

Sure, not every option will have the logistics for a sound system, a stage, etc. But any glimmer of an idea along these lines is worth looking into. And I guarantee you,

the number of other acts competing for a spot at one of these offbeat events will be much less than the number you find at the traditional live music venues.

So ... expand your definition of a live performance, ask yourself empowering questions, and open your mind to the many new ways you have to reach fans through live performances.

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# The First Question You Must Answer When Promoting Your Music

*This article is excerpted from Bob Baker's [Guerrilla Music Marketing Handbook](#).*

I'm going to use up this entire article dealing with one subject, because I think it's vital to the success of your music promotion efforts. Every day I see the same mistakes being made in this area and feel I owe it to you to drive this crucial point home.

Suppose you walked into your local record store and one of the employees (a complete stranger to you) came up and handed you a box filled with CDs and said, "Here, these are extra promo copies. You can have any CD you want out of the box."

Now let's pretend that you were not familiar with any of these artists. As you picked up each CD to consider whether or not you wanted it, what would be the first question to pop into your head? In other words, what basic question would you need to answer first before you could make an intelligent (and quick) decision on which one you'd take?

Would it be "Who produced this CD?"

No.

Would it be "What record label put this out?"

No.

How about "What are the names of the musicians and what instruments do they play?"

No.

Would it be "I wonder how great these folks think their own music is?"

No.

## Is That Your Final Answer?

Hopefully, you've come to the same conclusion that I have. The first question that anyone asks when encountering new music is: "What kind of music is this?"

I've used this box of free CDs example to make a point: This is exactly the same position that music editors, radio program directors, A&R people and music publishers are in when they receive your unsolicited recordings along with dozens of others. Even though it's great to think that everyone already knows who you are and what you do, the sad truth is that most of your contacts will be clueless. That's why giving them the first (and most important) clue up front is essential.

Human beings need some way to process information and file it away in the proper place in their heads before proceeding to any follow-up questions, such as "Where is this band from?" or "What unique spin do they put on this genre?" Without creating a mental category or comparison to something fans are already familiar with, it's nearly impossible to get to these important follow-up questions. And if you can't move this sorting-out process along in a swift manner, your music marketing efforts end up dead in the water.

Why, then, do so many people who promote music either ignore answering this fundamental question – "What kind of music is this?" – or bury the answer so deep in their press materials that the reader gives up out of frustration before ever uncovering it?

Unless you are (or are working with) a well-known artist, the people receiving your promo kits will be in the dark as to who you are and what you play. Your job, therefore, is to answer that first all-important question right off the bat: "What kind of music is this?" It should be one of the first things people see when viewing your press package.

## **Straight From the Slush Pile**

Here's an example I randomly pulled out of the overflowing box of review CDs in my office not long ago when I was a music editor. When opening the package, the first thing I see is a cover letter. Here's how it reads (I've changed the name of the person, label and band to protect the misguided):

"My name is John Jones, vice-president of Widget Records, here in New York. I'm writing to announce that one of our bands, the Losers, will be playing in St. Louis on July 24."

It's important to Jones that he announces who he is and what he does right off the bat. I'm sure this makes him feel good about himself. But how does this introduction move him closer to his goal of getting media coverage for the poor Losers? At least I know about the St. Louis date, something that should matter to me. But since I don't know what kind of music this is, I'm not impressed. On to the next paragraph.

"The Losers' music is already on national college and commercial radio."

Excellent. His mother must be very proud of him. But is this jazz radio? Alternative radio? Polka radio? Ten stations? Eight hundred stations? Huh? I'm still being kept in the dark.

"The Losers are a new band founded in 1994 in New York City. These shows are part of the year-long tour to promote their debut album."

More senseless background details before I even know what kind of music this band plays. But one thing I do know is that Jones sure likes talking about his band and its accomplishments. Now I'm starting to doze off from reading this.

## **The Music Needle in the Haystack**

Finally, I come across this line ...

"The Losers' music combines Celtic violin with punk-influenced distorted guitars and melodic rock vocals ...

What? A description of the music? Say it isn't so! And I only had to wait till the fourth paragraph to get it. And it ends up being a pretty cool description: Celtic violin with punk guitars. Now that's different. That's something I'd like to pop in the CD player and check out. What a great media hook for the band.

Unfortunately, the label's vice-president has done the group a disservice by burying this vital piece of information in a dreary cover letter. Most media people would have given up on it long before they got to the intriguing description.

But this never occurred to Jones. It was much more important for him to pound his chest and proclaim his name, title, city and the fact that his as-yet-undefined band was getting radio airplay. What a missed opportunity! Don't make this same error.

How much better it would have been if his letter went something like this:

"Dear Bob,

When we first told people we had signed a band that combined Celtic violins with distorted punk guitars and melodic rock vocals, they told us we were crazy. But we proved them all wrong with the Losers, a band that is now on a major roll. Last month alone, over 325 college stations around the country were playing cuts off the band's new self-titled CD. And now you can experience the Losers for yourself when they come to St. Louis on July 24. I think your readers would get a kick out of hearing about this unusual Celtic/violin/ punk/melodic mixture ..."

This version (though it could probably be reshaped and made even stronger) pulls you in and lets you know what you're dealing with quickly and interestingly – as opposed to Jones's dry resume listings.

## **Are You Guilty of a PR Felony?**

Now take a look at some of the promotional tools you're using right now. What's the first thing you see? Your address? The band members' names? The record label name? Some vague reference to how impressive your music is without a specific definition of it?

Stop beating around the bush and start getting to the heart of the matter. Media and industry people are partly overworked and partly lazy. Don't shroud your message in mystery, hoping it will tease people and make them read further. Remember this important rule: No one will ever be as interested in reading your press materials as you will. So give them what they need up front, fast and simple.

And answer the most important question first: "What kind of music is this?"

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# The Ultimate Music Business Conspiracy Theory

*by Bob Baker*

Whether it's the second gunman on the grassy knoll, the alien mystery at Roswell or what really is hidden within the high-security confines of Area 51... conspiracy theories abound. Many of us are amused by the speculation, while hardcore buffs examine every nuance looking for clues to support their version of the story.

If you'll notice, all of these conspiracy theories involve some type of dastardly deed or cover-up. Someone is out to brainwash us or hide the facts from the public. After all, "the truth is out there," according to X-Files scripture. I never seem to hear people suspecting, for instance, a conspiracy by furniture salesman to stuff money into the nooks and crannies of the couches they sell. Yet I always find change under the cushions when I clean. Hmm... maybe they're secretly... Oh, never mind.

There's another kind of conspiracy conjurer. You know the type. The artist, musician or writer who believes the deck has been stacked against him or that nobody will ever give her a break. "This town is just not artist-friendly," he/she proclaims. "This sucks. Why bother?"

To listen to these people, you'd think the radio stations, theatre groups, art galleries (or whatever venue applies) were all part of a sick joke, trying to obliterate creative growth. And just like the bigger conspiracy nuts, they find clues and plenty of ammo to support their claims.

"See, that guy never returned my call," they announce. "I can't buy a job in this town." Anything even remotely inconvenient that happens to them lends credence to the devious master plot.

Here's a fun little game that I challenge you to play. It's called the Inverse Conspiracy Game. For one entire day, I encourage you to go through the day believing wholeheartedly that there is a conspiracy involving you. Only with this Inverse Conspiracy, the whole world and everyone in it are involved in a conspiracy to help you succeed.

If you're familiar with the recent Jim Carey movie "The Truman Show," you know what I mean. In the film, everything that happens to the main character is a preplanned scene – only he has no idea it's fabricated.

So for one day, imagine that everyone is pitching in on a secret mission to help you. There's a positive reason behind everything that happens to you. Even seemingly negative events are put into action in order to propel you toward a reward that's just around the corner. And it's your job to break the code and figure out exactly how the world intends for you to use what happens to your advantage.

True, this isn't your father's conspiracy theory. It will take some brain work to reorient your mental perspective – especially to keep it up for an entire day. But just think how this shift in attitude might alter your progress. You'll be forced to view everything in a far more constructive light. And when bad things do happen, it will be your mission to find the hidden opportunity (instead of more reasons to stop trying to reach your creative goals).

Give this inverse conspiracy theory a try. You can always go back to looking for evil schemes and cover-ups. In the meantime, you just might discover an alien on a grassy knoll waiting to help you succeed.

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### **Recommended resources:**

- [Killer Press Kits – Deluxe Edition](#)
- [Guerrilla Music Marketing Power Course](#)
- [50 Ways to Promote & Sell Your Music on the Internet](#)
- [Guerrilla Music Marketing Handbook](#)
- [What Every Musician Should Know About Self-Promotion](#)
- [Music Marketing Crash Course](#)
- [Online Music PR Hot List](#)
- [Unleash the Artist Within](#)
- [Guerrilla Music Marketing, Encore Edition](#)
- [Branding Yourself Online](#)

# Final Thoughts

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Bob Baker is the author of "Guerrilla Music Marketing Handbook," "Killer Music Press Kits," "Music Marketing Crash Course," and "What Every Musician Should Know About Self-Promotion." He also publishes [www.TheBuzzFactor.com](http://www.TheBuzzFactor.com), a web site and e-zine that deliver marketing tips, self-promotion ideas and empowering messages to music people of all kinds. Get your FREE subscription to Bob's e-zine by visiting <http://TheBuzzFactor.com/> today.

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